

Fort Barrancas  
Near the northeast corner of the intersection  
of San Carlos and Hovey Roads  
Pensacola Naval Air Station  
Pensacola  
Escambia County  
Florida

HABS No. FLA-143

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17-PENSA

2.

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## FORT BARRANCAS

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Location: Near the northeast corner of the intersection of San Carlos and Hovey Roads, Pensacola Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Escambia County, Florida.

Present Owner: U. S. Government, Department of Interior, National Park Service

Present Use: Unoccupied

Statement of Significance: The United States built this irregular four-sided fort, set within a "V" shaped counterscarp, to back up the smaller semi-circular Spanish fortification of the Bateria de San Antonio as part of the defense of the entrance channel of Pensacola Bay.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Pensacola Bay was discovered by the Spanish adventurer, Panfilio de Narvarex, who landed on the south shore of Santa Rosa Island in October of 1528. Don Tristan de Luna y Arellano attempted to establish a permanent settlement in 1559, which was abandoned. In 1698, after a 1693 expedition by Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Gongora, Spaniards resettled on the shores of Pensacola Bay and built a pine log, field redoubt, San Carlos de Austria, on the bluff called la barranca which overlooked the entrance channel of the bay. After contesting for the bay in 1719, the French destroyed the Spanish fortifications in 1720 and occupied the area until 1722. When the Spanish returned a new fortification was built on Santa Rosa Island, which was maintained until a hurricane destroyed the site in 1752. The survivors built a new blockhouse at a slightly higher elevation on Santa Rosa, though some established themselves at the blockhouse called Fort San Miguel at the present site of the city of Pensacola. In 1756 the Mexican viceroy, Marques de las Amarillas, established the bay presidio at the fort calling it San Miguel de las Amarillas, which induced the king of Spain in 1757 to proclaim by a royal order that the name "Panzacola" would be used. The village and the San Miguel and the Santa Rosa Island fortifications were turned over to the British in 1763 after the Treaty of Paris. The British built a small stockade with a ditch on Barrancas as part of their fortifications of the bay. All including

Fort George and its redoubts, Pensacola's defenses, were surrendered to Spanish forces in a siege of 1781 and were officially returned to Spain in 1783. Although the Spanish retained several of the English fortifications, by 1796 it was necessary to refortify the deteriorating defenses of the bay. The masonry Bateria de San Antonio was constructed in conjunction with the stockade, Castillo de San Carlos, which defended the rear of the battery.

After Spain ceded Louisiana to France in 1801 and France sold it to the United States in 1803, the stockade on Barrancas was strengthened to defend Pensacola, the provincial capital of West Florida, from an American invasion, which almost took place in 1813. In 1814 a British command, with the consent of the Pensacola commandant, was allowed to occupy Fort San Miguel, formerly Fort George, and the Castillo de San Carlos, which were subsequently abandoned to American forces attempting to quell Indian insurrections though not before the British destroyed San Carlos and spiked the guns of San Antonio. The United States returned Pensacola to Spain. A stockade was rebuilt near the San Carlos site which, together with the bay, was surrendered again to American forces under Andrew Jackson in 1818 and was diplomatically returned to Spain early in 1819. The deteriorating defenses of the bay were officially transferred to the United States in 1821 when East and West Florida were ceded by Spain. U. S. troops were garrisoned on Barrancas until 1825 when the area was turned over to the Department of the Navy.

The Territory of Florida officially sold the peninsula between Bayou Grande and the Pensacola Bay, which included Barrancas, to the United States for a Naval Reserve in 1832. On the site of Castillo de San Carlos the U. S. Department of Engineers built for the Department of the Navy Fort Barrancas (HABS No. FLA-143), which was connected to the Bateria de San Antonio, itself largely rebuilt. The Department of the Navy lands were transferred to the War Department in 1844. Fort Barrancas was held by the Confederates from January of 1861 to May of 1862 when it was recaptured by Union troops. The brick fortifications on Barrancas were abandoned after the Civil War, though the U. S. Army maintained the area, collectively known as Fort Barrancas, until 1947 when it was turned over to the U. S. Naval Air Station. The National Park Service acquired Bateria de San Antonio and Fort Barrancas as part of the National Seashores July 1, 1972.

2. Date of erection: In December of 1838, Col. William H. Chase of the U. S. Department of Engineers submitted a plat indicating the site. By September 30, 1840, Chase

submitted a plat showing the new Fort Barrancas as related to the older Spanish fortifications. The fort was substantially completed by 1844.

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3. Architect: Col. William H. Chase, U. S. Department of Engineers, was instrumental in designing and building the American fortifications of Pensacola Bay.
4. Original plans and construction information: Contained within the records of the National Archives, Cartographic Division (NNCS) and the Old Military Records Division is extensive information concerning the Barrancas fortifications. See section C for an annotated bibliography.
5. Alterations and additions: The fortifications have been little altered, though the exterior access openings into the riflemen's galleries and casemates have been closed for security purposes. A modern wooden foot bridge crosses the dry ditch from the counterscarp to the scarp.
6. Important old views: Three photocopies of Civil War photographs accompany this data.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

In 1825 the second phase, beyond shipbuilding, of the so-called "Pensacola Plan" necessitated the fortification of the navy base and the provision of a strong defense on the Gulf Coast. The United States, which had few military engineers skilled in the design of coastal fortifications, had to adapt to the major changes in warfare which made earlier defense systems obsolete. Finally the Department of Engineers did select William H. Chase to design and build the forts which were to defend the naval base and the city of Pensacola. Chase's designs were based on a system proposed by the Spanish at the beginning of the eighteenth century which was to strategically fortify the entrance channel to the bay and provide necessary cross-fire.

The main fort, which was constructed on the western end of Santa Rosa Island, was the five-sided Fort Pickens begun as the first fortification in 1829 and completed in 1834. Flanking the entrance to Pensacola Bay, across from Fort Pickens, was Fort McRee built between 1834 and 1844. Facing the entrance to the bay was the Bateria de San Antonio which was extensively rebuilt and backed up with the construction of Fort Barrancas, in turn backed up by the smaller Fort Redoubt (HABS No. FLA-145). Chase's scheme provided a defense against naval ordnance and invasion as well as frontal assault. The U. S. Government provided little for maintaining the forts with materials and troops after their completion. Thus,

Commodore James Armstrong, commandant of the Navy Yard, surrendered the forts and the Yard to the Florida and Alabama militia, under the command of Col. Chase, with minimal opposition on January 12, 1861. (Armstrong was tried by a court martial in Washington, D. C., and was convicted of neglect of duty, disobedience of orders, and conduct unbecoming an officer.) Lt. Adam Slemmer, though, ignored Commodore Armstrong's surrender, mustered troops and retreated to Fort Pickens, which had been unoccupied for a decade. From Fort Pickens Federal troops mounted attacks on the surrounding forts and became the staging area for the troop build-up which successfully retook the Navy Yard on May 10, 1862. The forts were abandoned after the Civil War. Pensacola Bay has claimed Fort McRee, while the other fortifications are in various stages of deterioration.

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C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

National Archives, Cartographic Division (NNCS), Drawer 79, Fortification File.

There are approximately 128 sheets, which include maps, plans and sketches, in this group which pertain to Forts Barrancas and Redoubt and date from 1838 to 1902. Though most deal with auxiliary buildings and later armament reports, the following are of particular note.

- a. "Plan of Fort San Carlos de Barrancas," 1838 (sheet 4).
- b. "Sketch of the Site of Old and New Fort San Carlos de Barrancas Exhibiting the Position of New Fort as Laid Out on the Ground: The Excavations for Counterscarp: and Masonry of the Same. Also the Position of the Old Battery The Repairs and Improvements of Which Have Been Completed Except the Laying Down of the Traverse Circles and Pintle Blocks for Gun Carriages, and the Fitting Magazine Casemate," 1840 (sheet 7).
- c. "Plan Sections and Elevation of Casemates in South Branch of Counterscarp.....," 1840 (sheet 8).
- d. "Sections and Elevations of Fort Barrancas: As Projected by the Board of Engineers," 1841 (sheet 11).
- e. "Details of Draw-Bridge," 1841 (sheet 12).

- f. "...the Conditions of the Work....," 1841 (sheet 16). HABS  
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- g. "A Sketch Exhibiting the Progress of the Work....," 1842 (sheet 18).
- h. "...Plan & Section of a Relieving Arch, Showing the Curved Wall, between Piers, and a Detail Showing a Bonding into the Piers of Said Wall," 1842 (sheet 19).
- i. "Sketch Showing the Mode of Securing Pintle Centers, Forming Gunners Platforms, and Earthen Banquetts," 1844 (sheet 21).

----, Old Military Records Division, Record Group 77:  
Chief of Engineers, DeGrange Index 1789-1889 General,  
Box 31 /Begin with entry 2917/.

This record group contains primarily letters from W. H. Chase concerning the construction of Fort Barrancas, annual reports, and land claims along with letters of transmittal which accompanied the plans and sketches that had been forwarded for approval. The 100 letters, which date from 1835 to 1870, include references to other fortifications in the area.

----, ----, Record Group 77: Office, Chief of Engineers:  
Land Papers, Box 23.

47 letters deal with boundary modifications and claims of local residents of the Barrancas military reservation, 1840-1893.

----, ----, Record Group 77: Letters and Reports of Col. Joseph G. Totten, Chief of Engineers, 1803-64, 10 volumes.

The letters contain official, specific orders on construction with some drawings. However, there are no Pensacola construction records.

----, ----, Record Group 77: Office, Chief of Engineers,  
Letters Received, 1838-66, Box C.

All the letters sent with the drawings in the Fortification File, Cartographic Division, and listed in the DeGrange Index are in this group.

----, ----, Record Group 77: Miscellaneous Forts File  
(1870-1899).

The material includes some later Fort Barrancas material.

-----, War Department: Letters Received, No. 5, Jan.  
1, 1838-Dec. 31, 1840, Engineer Department.

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Most of the letters acknowledge receipt of Engineer Orders and Circulars which are not included. According to the Old Military Records Division Engineer Orders and Circulars generally dealt with personnel changes and very seldom with actual construction.

2. Secondary and published sources:

John Appleyard Agency (ed.). Pensacola's Navy Yard--1528-1911. Pensacola: 1967.

Stanley Faye. The Spanish and British Fortifications of Pensacola, 1698-1821. Pensacola: The Pensacola Historical Society, 1972.

Prepared by Rodd L. Wheaton  
Architect, HABS  
1972

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. General Description: The enceinte is an irregular, four-sided fortification set within a "V" shaped outworks containing riflemen's galleries and terminal gun casemates. A dry ditch between the scarp and counterscarp walling opens at the south into a space confined by the north wall of Bateria de San Antonio, which is connected to the parade of Fort Barrancas by a tunnel. The condition of the fabric is good, though there has been some structural failure, the result of partial collapse of vaulting at the intersections of the enceinte riflemen's galleries. The brick masonry is mouldering in certain areas which are subjected to continual dampness. The exterior access openings to the casemates and galleries have been closed with modern masonry.
- B. Technical Description:
1. Overall dimensions: The maximum dimensions of 353' x 451' includes the outworks construction.
  2. Construction: The masonry bearing walls of the fort are constructed of smooth, moulded brick laid in common bond. The interior spaces have brick segmental and semicircular

barrel vaulting and archways. Dressed granite blocks are used throughout at various stress points.

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3. Outworks:

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- a. Glacis: A glacis slopes north and west from the counterscarp's cordon into the terrain. The south casemate roof structure is exposed. A brick paved ramp extends through the glacis to the edge of the counterscarp cordon at the sally port bridge.
- b. Counterscarp: The cordon, consisting of a double course of brick corbelled from the sheer walling, is completed with a cap of brick laid on edge in running bond. The walling, which is raked beyond the south and the east casemates, is perforated with segmentally arched loopholes and embrasures, ventilation openings, and access doorways to the two riflemen's galleries. The galleries extend between the gun casemates which are located at the west intersection of the counterscarp walls and at the south and east terminals.
  - (1) Riflemen's galleries: The barrel vaulted galleries are brick paved. Opening from the galleries are the loopholes, approximately 12'-0" on center, which have segmentally arched heads and splayed reveals which narrow to a slit. Typically, the full width of the opening is expressed as a recessed panel at the face of the walling. Each counterscarp loophole has a corbelled arch ventilation opening above it which forms a slit at the face of the walling. A stairway near the center of the north gallery leads to a tunnel passing beneath the dry ditch to a postern below the sally port.
  - (2) Gun casemates: Each gun casemate consists of two barrel vaulted spaces which are perpendicular to the gallery vaulting and are located at the terminal ends of the riflemen's galleries. The casemates are segmentally arched and have splayed reveal embrasures above a granite sill set with an iron pintle. Above each embrasure is a rectangular ventilation opening with a steeply sloped sill to allow maximum ventilation below the vaulting which is not bonded into the counterscarp wall. Loopholes are located on each side of each embrasure. Curved granite tracks for gun mobility are located within the brick paved flooring.



- (3) Magazines: These vaulted spaces adjacent to the casemates have mortise and tenon construction, wood frame partitions and wall and ceiling sheathing over furring. The floors are also wood. HABS FLA 17-PENSA 2-

- c. Dry ditch tunnel: This tunnel has a segmentally arched vault. The floor surface is obscured by earth and debris.
- d. Dry ditch: The dry ditch, formed by the scarp and counterscarp walling, has a sand surface.

4. Enceinte:

- a. Scarp: The brick walling of the scarp wall has a cordon of three courses of corbelled brick which supports a double course cap paved with edge laid brick in running bond. Granite blocks, cut to simulate the brick corbels, are set at the corner angles. A plain granite slab is set over the sally port. At all four elevations the sheer scarp wall is perforated with segmentally arched loopholes. Ventilation openings are centered over pairs of loopholes.
- (1) Riflemen's galleries: The riflemen's galleries consist of vaulted spaces which are perpendicular to the scarp wall and are not bonded into it. Each vaulted space contains two loopholes and one ventilation opening. Concave walls, an average of 4'-8" high, retain sloping earth fill which fills the rear of each gallery space to the soffit of the vault. The floor is sand. A wood plank floor on iron joists is located at the intersection of the riflemen's gallery and the tunnel which connects to Bateria de San Antonio. At the intersection of the riflemen's galleries within the angles of the enceinte scarp, the spaces are shored with heavy timber construction to support the partial collapse of the vaulting.
- (2) Guard and draw machinery room: This is a vaulted space a few steps above the riflemen's gallery level. Granite blocks support the axel and ratchet of the machinery which originally operated a draw bridge at the sally port.
- (3) Magazine: The enceinte magazine is similar to those of the outworks.

- b. Parapet wall: The parapet wall, without a banquette, extends approximately 4'-8" above the terreplein. The acute angles of the walls are truncated which forms a seven-sided polygon in plan. The rampart slope to the cordon is uniform. HABS  
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- c. Terreplein: The flat earth surface of the terreplein contains a series of semicircular steel gun mounts set on granite footings. In addition miscellaneous existing granite and concrete pintle blocks and iron pintles relate to various types of artillery. A well head is located to the north. Near the southwest corner a concrete footing retains embedded eye bolts, the remains of a tower. South granite and brick steps with modern pipe railings, below semicircular steps at the parapet wall, provide access to the irregularly defined lower parade level.
- d. Parade: The parade, with an uneven earth surface, has a brick ramp paved in running bond which extends through the sally port. Steps between the terreplein steps provide access to the postern of the tunnel leading to Bateria de San Antonio. The postern doorway, with its semicircular guaged brick archway under a granite landing slab, is closed with modern masonry. Located behind the modern masonry are heavy wood doors of two thicknesses each having a stile and rail frame and beaded, vertical boards riveted together. The panels of the stile and rail sides, which originally faced the parade, are infilled with beaded, diagonal boards. Strap iron hinges swing on iron pintles driven into the masonry.
- e. Sally port: Guaged segmental brick archways and brick vaulting defines the sally port a few steps above the guardrooms with its running bond paved flooring and brick ramp which leads from the steeply sloping granite sill above the dry ditch, beneath the rampart, supported on a granite block at the cordon, over the riflemen's galleries, through outward splayed walls which retain the terreplein, and onto the parade. Judging from the Civil War photograph of the sally port, the parade retaining walls have been somewhat altered and heightened. Granite imposts and draw bridge machinery blocks are incorporated into the brickwork.
- f. Sally port bridge: The modern wood frame bridge is supported on two brick piers which have granite caps and are set within the dry ditch.

- D. Site and Surroundings: Fort Barrancas is located on the south side of a peninsula between Bayou Grande and the Pensacola Bay, opposite the entrance channel from the Gulf of Mexico into Pensacola Bay. It is situated on a low bluff above the shoreline approximately 60' north of Bateria de San Antonio. Fort Redoubt (HABS No. FLA-145) is to the northwest. The Pensacola Lighthouse (HABS No. FLA-147) and the Naval Air Station's Forrest Sherman Field are to the west. The U. S. Naval Hospital and its quarters, which originally housed the officers and enlisted men of Fort Barrancas, are to the east.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, AIA  
HABS--Pensacola  
August 12, 1968

### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project, sponsored by the Pensacola Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission, now known as the Historic Pensacola Preservation Board of Trustees, in cooperation with the Historic American Buildings Survey, was recorded during the summer of 1968 in Pensacola under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of HABS; Professor F. Blair Reeves, AIA (University of Florida), Project Supervisor; and Student Assistant Architects John O. Crosby (University of Florida), David L. Van de Ven, Jr. (Texas Technological College), and Edward Bondi, Jr. (University of Florida). The historical information was prepared by Professor Samuel Proctor (University of Florida), by Assistant Historian Linda V. Ellsworth (Historic Pensacola Preservation Board), and by Rodd L. Wheaton (Architect, HABS) who edited all the data in 1972.

Addendum to:

Fort Barrancas  
Near the northeast corner  
of San Carlos and Hovey Roads  
Pensacola  
Escambia County  
Florida  
as recorded in 1962, 1968

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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